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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on three groups of children and youth who appear to be at risk for depressed educational attainment. The groups are those from single parent families, those from persistently poor families, and those who give birth during their teenage years. A significant number of the country's children and youth are from these groups. School policies and practices play a significant role in the educational attainment process for them, as do the expectations that school personnel have for these students and others and the ways that schools interact with the parents of these students. Family income is another important factor. A key finding is that there is no single cause of depressed educational attainment for any of the three groups in question. Some policy implications of these findings are the following: (1) programs should be developed that respond to a combination of the contributing factors, such as remedial instruction for both students and parents; (2) policies and programs should attempt to reduce income factors associated with low educational attainment; (3) programs should have research functions built into them for longitudinal studies; (4) policies should be flexible, taking into account the dynamic nature of the target population; and (5) policies must strengthen the interaction between these groups and the schools. (VM)

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Report No. 87-290 EPW

THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF SELECT GROUPS OF "AT RISK" CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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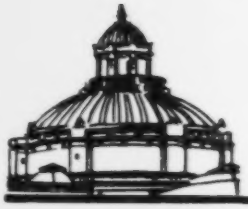

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on three select groups of children and youth who appear to be "at risk" for depressed educational attainment--those from single-parent families, those from persistently poor families, and those who give birth during their teenage years. It addresses three basic questions:

(1) Are these groups of children and youth at risk of depressed educational attainment?

(2) How might these characteristics lead to depressed educational attainment?

(3) What implications does the current research have for examining Federal responses to the educational needs of these children and youth?

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THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF SELECT GROUPS OF "AT RISK" CHILDREN AND YOUTH

I. INTRODUCTION

Policymakers at all levels of government express concern about the educational attainment and performance of children and youth in this country. At the Federal level, this attention to education is prompted by various issues, including concern over the Nation's economic productivity, its trade imbalance, calls for changes in welfare programs, international scientific and technological competition, and the relatively poor showing of U.S. students in international academic comparisons. Increasingly, policymakers are focusing on the education of children and youth considered most likely to fail in our schools and economy.

This paper analyzes the educational attainment of three select groups of children and youth--those from single-parent families, those from persistently poor families, and those who give birth in their teenage years. 1/ These groups are among those often cited as "at risk" for a variety of negative experiences, such as dropping out of school, being unable to find productive employment, or subsisting upon welfare. The analysis in this paper might assist Federal

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1/ These groups are treated separately in this analysis. Although clearly they overlap, there is little available research on individuals who might be members of all three groups. The last group (persons who give birth during their teenage years) includes only teenage women who give birth; it does not include teenage males who father children or married teenagers without children.

policymakers as they consider measures to address the educational needs of these and other disadvantaged children and youth. This study addresses three basic questions:

(1) Are children and youth from single-parent families, those from persistently poor families, and teenagers who give birth at risk of depressed educational attainment? 2/

(2) How might these characteristics lead to depressed educational attainment?

(3) What implications does the current research have for examining Federal responses to the educational needs of these children and youth?

This paper is organized as follows. First, it provides a brief analytical summary of its findings. Then it presents an overview of the public policy context within which the education of "at risk" children and youth is being considered, and the rationale for focusing on these three groups of children and youth, in particular. The next section considers the utility of educational attainment as a way of measuring educational or other success. The next three sections separately analyze the educational attainment of these three groups of children and youth. The conclusion of this paper draws from this analysis to answer, as best they can be, the questions listed above.

2/ Attainment for purposes of the paper is generally defined as years of school completed, although completion of high school is also an important focus. A subsidiary concern is the educational performance of these groups as measured by grades, test scores and behavior.

II. ANALYTICAL SUMMARY 3/

This paper highlights the fact that a substantial percentage of the country's children and youth are currently found in the three groups under analysis here, and that an even greater proportion will be members of these groups at some time during their childhood. In 1985, 1 of every 4 children resided with a single parent and 1 in 5 resided in a family in poverty. In 1984, 1 of every 20 teenage women had a child; over half of these teenagers were unmarried. Estimates are that 1 of 20 children will be poor for at least two-thirds of their childhood years; and that at least 3 out of 5 children will live with a single parent at some juncture.

The available evidence shows that children and youth in each of these groups suffer, on average, some degree of depressed educational attainment. In general, the attainment loss associated with the distinguishing characteristic of each of these groups may be about a year or more. A significant portion of that attainment loss appears to stem directly from other factors that are themselves associated with those distinguishing characteristics. For example, the depressed educational attainment of children from one-parent families may arise, in part, directly from the structure of the family and, in part, indirectly from other factors associated with the one-parent family structure, such

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3/ References for all of the data presented in this summary are provided in subsequent sections of this paper.

as low-income. Precisely how these characteristics and the factors with which they are associated influence educational attainment is not clear.

The analysis focuses on the effects that schools might have on enhancing or depressing the educational attainment of these children and youth. It finds that school policies or the absence of policies may play a significant role in the attainment process. Some of these effects may stem from the expectations that school personnel have for the academic and social performance of children and youth from these groups. Some may result from how schools interact with the parents of these children and youth.

The implications for policy formulation of the findings in this paper are numerous. Despite growing pressure to respond to the educational and other needs of "at risk" groups of children and youth, policymaking will be difficult, in part due to the complex processes through which progress in educational attainment is realized. No single factor emerges as the key to attainment losses, although income is clearly important, as are school practices. As a result, one response might be the development of comprehensive policies, addressing the needs of parents and children in family and school settings. Alternatively, in light of the administrative, political, and financial difficulties potentially associated with a comprehensive response, a response might be relatively narrow, tailored to address an aspect of the problem, such as school practices. Indeed, still another policy option might be considered, that of encouraging many responses from schools, communities, parent groups, business, and other institutions to the needs of these "at risk" groups of children and youth.

Further confounding policy development are the serious limitations of the available research and data. Policymakers might want to consider addressing their informational needs in the initial stages of examining responses to the educational needs of these groups.

III. PUBLIC POLICY AND THE EDUCATION OF "AT RISK" CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The characteristics of the Nation's elementary and secondary school population are undergoing dramatic change. Among other trends, this population is now more likely to be from minority groups, to be drawn from families in poverty, to speak a language other than English in the home, and to be from single-parent families. 4/ The "at risk" children and youth being addressed by public policy at all levels are identified by these and other characteristics. Those that define and distinguish the three particular groups under analysis in this paper (living with a single parent, persistent poverty, teenage childbearing) are among the ones being frequently used to characterize "at risk" populations. Indeed, the term "underclass," although defined in various ways, is commonly applied to populations exhibiting these traits, among others. 5/

4/ National Governors' Association. Time for Results. The Governors' 1991 Report on Education, Aug. 1986. p. 98-99; Hodgkinson, Harold L. All One System: Demographics of Education, Kindergarten through Graduate School. The Institute for Educational Leadership, 1985. p. 10; McNett, Ian. Demographic Imperatives: Implications for Educational Policy. Report of the June 8, 1983 forum on "The Demographics of Changing Ethnic Populations and the Implications for Elementary-Secondary and Postsecondary Educational Policy," no date. p. 7-17.

5/ Auletta, Ken. The Underclass, 1983; Glasgow, Douglas G. The Black Underclass: Poverty, Unemployment, and Entrapment of Ghetto Youth, 1980; Lemann, Nicholas. The Origins of the Underclass. The Atlantic Monthly, June 1986. p. 31-43, 47-55.

The growing presence of "at risk" children and youth poses a dilemma for schools in two ways. First, schools have not always served these students well. As one analysis concludes:

> Traditionally, our nation's schools have been least successful with students who are black, Hispanic, or native American and who come from single-parent homes or low-income families. . . . The nation's schools face the prospect of working with an increasing number of students from groups with whom they have been less successful. 6/

Second, concern about the educational attainment and performance of disadvantaged children and youth receives impetus from the extensive effort, in recent years, to reform America's elementary and secondary schools. 7/ Nearly every State has taken one or more steps to raise academic standards. Among these steps are establishing minimum competency tests for high school graduation, specifying the number of courses in different subjects students need to complete in order to graduate, and tying participation in extracurricular activities to academic performance.

Now, participants in the reform movement, many of them at the State level, are increasingly concerned that the new standards may place some groups of disadvantaged students even further at risk for academic failure. A so-called "second wave" of reform is anticipated, one that is expected to seek to ensure

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6/ National Governors' Association, Time for Results, p. 99.

7/ U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Education Reform Reports: Content and Impact. Report No. 86-56 EPW, by James B. Stedman and K. Forbis Jordan. Mar. 17, 1986.

that the current rate at which children fail to complete school will not rise as a consequence of reform activity. 8/

Attention to the education of "at risk" children and youth is not reserved to States and other active participants in the present school reform movement. The 99th Congress explored possible Federal legislative action to ameliorate the educational and other difficulties of some of these groups of disadvantaged students. The Congress was prompted, in part, by concerns that ranged from the domestic and international economic consequences of inadequately educating a significant portion of the population, to the implications of educational failure for equal opportunity in education and the job market.

Some of the actions taken in the 99th Congress are described below. Amendments to the Job Training Partnership Act, enacted as P.L. 99-496, focus funds on educational efforts to (1) address illiteracy among youth and adults, and (2) establish statewide programs improving students' school-to-work transition. The Congress approved the funding of special child care services for disadvantaged college students in the Higher Education Amendments of 1986 (P.L. 99-498). The House approved bills seeking to reduce the high school dropout rate, to provide basic literacy skills to parents of young children so they can

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8/ National Governors' Association, Time for Results; National Coalition of Advocates for Students. Barriers to Excellence: Our Children at Risk. Jan. 1985; Hispanic Policy Development Project. National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics. Make Something Happen. Hispanics and Urban High School Reform, v. 1, 1984; Levin, Henry M. Educational Reform for Disadvantaged Students: An Emerging Crisis. National Education Association, 1986; McDill, E. L., et al. Raising Standards and Retaining Students: The Impact of the Reform Recommendations on Potential Dropouts. Review of Educational Research, winter 1985.

assist in their children's education, and to promote an approach to school reform shown to be effective particularly with disadvantaged, urban, minority students. 9/ The House-passed version (H.R. 3128) of the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-272) would have authorized funding for States to provide educational and vocational services to pregnant youth and those with children who were eligible for assistance under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. This language was not enacted.

In addition, bills were introduced into both houses of Congress addressing a variety of issues related to the education of disadvantaged children and youth. These included programs to develop basic skills of disadvantaged secondary school students, programs to encourage development of early childhood programs, and programs to facilitate the use of senior citizens in schools in order to improve communication between schools and families with educationally disadvantaged children. 10/

9/ The Dropout Prevention and Reentry Act of 1986, H.R. 3042, was passed by the House on Aug. 7, 1986. It would have authorized grants to local educational agencies for development and implementation of programs to identify dropouts and potential dropouts, to provide outreach and reentry services, to address the needs of pregnant and parenting students, and to disseminate information. The Effective Schools and Even Start Act, H.R. 4463, was passed by the House on June 17, 1986. It would have provided that a specific portion of each State's Chapter 2 block grant funds (awarded under the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981, P.L. 97-35) would have had to be used to support programs focusing on strengthened leadership in schools, improved basic and higher order skills, a school environment conducive to learning, an expectation that all students can learn, and continuous monitoring of progress. The bill would also have authorized a program, using funds from Chapter 2 and the Adult Education Act, to provide adult literacy training to parents and instruction in activities that enhance their young children's educational achievement. Neither bill was acted on by the Senate.

10/ See, for example, the Secondary School Basic Skills Act, H.R. 901 and S. 508; H.R. 2557 (untitled); the Children's Survival Act, H.R. 3114 and S. 1237; the Intergenerational Education Volunteer Network Act of 1985, S. 1022; the Targeted Education Assistance Act, S. 2598. For descriptions of these and other bills addressing education reform issues, see U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Education in America: Reports on Its Condition, Recommendations for Change. Issue Brief No. IB83106, James B. Stedman (archived).

The 100th Congress is returning to these issues. Education of the disadvantaged is likely to be a component of congressional attention to issues concerning the world economy and trade, employment, and welfare reform, among others. Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981, P.L. 97-35, the basic Federal elementary and secondary education program targeted to disadvantaged students, requires action because of its pending expiration.

The Administration's FY 1988 budget request contains some proposals aimed at the education of disadvantaged youth. For example, it has proposed that teenage mothers currently receiving payments under the AFDC be required to return to high school, if they have not already earned a high school diploma. The President has made education a key component of his initiative on U.S. economic competitiveness. 11/ Among the recommendations in this initiative are improving the basic skills of children; raising educational standards (e.g., the President recommends the number of years of study in specific fields that should be needed for high school graduation); and increasing attention to the education of economically disadvantaged children and youth.

11/ White House. Fact Sheet on the President's Competitiveness Initiative. Jan. 27, 1987.

IV. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The analysis in this paper focuses on the educational attainment of select groups of children and youth for a variety of reasons. Higher levels of educational attainment have been associated with many positive personal and social outcomes, including less involvement in crime; less reliance on welfare; extensive awareness of, and participation in, civic affairs; better health; markedly greater lifetime earnings; and less unemployment. 12/ The financial consequences for the society of depressed educational attainment are estimated to be high, perhaps in the billions of dollars for each high school class. 13/

Clearly, then, the exploration of the educational attainment of these select groups of "at risk" children and youth has a broader context than simply success in moving through the educational system. It would appear that the ultimate occupational status and earnings of members of these groups are intimately related to their educational attainment. Research on the process through

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12/ Webb, Lillian D. The Public Economic Benefits of a High School Education. In Educational Need in the Public Economy, Alexander, Kern and K. Forbis Jordan, eds., 1976. p. 64-83; Bowen, Howard R. Investment in Learning: The Individual and Social Value of American Higher Education. The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1977; Catterall, James S. On the Social Costs of Dropping Out of Schools. Stanford Education Policy Institute, 86-SEPI-3, Dec. 1985; Hyman, Herbert H., et al. The Enduring Effects of Education, 1975; Cohany, Sharon R. What Happened to the High School Class of 1985? Monthly Labor Review, Oct. 1986. p. 28-30.

13/ Catterall, On the Social Costs, p. 17.

which individuals gain occupational and career status in this society offers strong support for this claim. 14/ Jencks, et al. concluded:

> When an individual first enters the labor market, the highest grade of school or college he has completed is the best single predictor of his eventual occupational status. 15/

This research also shows that certain transition years (the last year of high school, the first year of college, or the last year of college) are worth more in terms of occupational status than other years of secondary school or college. 16/ That is, the payoff for completing each of those years is greater than the payoff for completing a year immediately before or after those years.

How should one measure educational attainment? Different perspectives on the educational attainment process suggest a variety of ways of measuring attainment, each of which may have significant public policy implications. One perspective suggests that the key component of the educational attainment process is the completion of courses of organized instruction in which knowledge or skills of general utility are taught. This perspective does not encompass the completion of courses (e.g., apprenticeship programs or employment training programs) at organizations in which instruction is ancillary to a primary activity.

14/ Featherman, David L., and Robert M. Hauser. Opportunity and Change, 1978; Sewell, William H., and Robert M. Hauser. Education, Occupation, and Earnings: Achievement in the Early Career, 1975; Sewell, William H., and Robert M. Hauser. Causes and Consequences of Higher Education: Models of the Status Attainment Process. In Schooling and Achievement in American Society, Sewell, William H., et al., eds., 1976. p. 9-28; Wolfle, Lee M. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Among Whites and Blacks. American Educational Research Journal. Winter 1985. p. 501-525; Alexander, Karl L., and Bruce K. Eckland. The Explorations in Equality of Opportunity Sample of 1955 High School Sophomores. In Research in Sociology of Education and Socialization: A Research Annual, Longitudinal Perspectives on Educational Attainment, Kerckhoff, Alan C. ed., v. 1., 1980; Jencks, Christopher, et al. Who Gets Ahead? The Determinants of Economic Success in America, 1979.

15/ Jencks, et al., Who Gets Ahead?, p. 223.

16/ Ibid.

Public policy based on this particular perspective would seek to increase the number of years of school completed by the population in general, without particular attention to who completes them, which years they are (e.g., the middle years of college), and any instruction not delivered through schools (e.g., on-the-job training).

Another perspective on educational attainment considers the successful crossing of key transition points in the educational process (such as high school graduation, college entrance, or completion of an undergraduate degree) as the critical element in the attainment process.

Public policy based on this perspective necessarily has to choose which of the transition points need attention. The relative importance of each transition from a public policy perspective is likely to be different for different populations, in different settings, and for different ultimate objectives. For example, in a population that traditionally has not finished high school and for which employment without a high school diploma is particularly problematic, completion of high school would be a first priority for policy. But, for another population that typically enters college, policy will focus on college completion, with perhaps some attention to those in this population who fail to enter college.

Another possible perspective on the educational attainment process concerns the relative ranking of individuals in terms of the number of years of schooling completed (e.g., division of a particular cohort into quartiles or fourths according to number of years of schooling completed). Such a perspective posits that the number of years of schooling that separate particular members of a population may be less important than how those individuals compare to the population in general. The difference between 13.4 years of schooling and 12.5 years may be particularly significant if those completing the former are in the top quartile of the population while those completing the latter are

in the bottom quartile; but, the difference may be less important if both levels of attainment would place persons in the top quartile.

Public policy based on this perspective might address relative inequality in the completion of years of schooling. Thus, its focus might be on narrowing the gap between the bottom group and the top group.

Although these clearly are not the only ways of viewing educational attainment, they do suggest the kinds of measures possible and that each perspective carries certain implications for policy development. The research on the attainment of these "at risk" groups typically measures the number of years of formal schooling completed. High school completion is the transition point most often addressed. The analysis in this paper follows suit.

A second question meriting some attention is, how is educational attainment translated into occupational and other advantages? Focusing on occupational status, one finds a number of theories. 17/ Educational attainment may be used by employers as a screening device for selecting individuals for employment and for selecting employees for promotion. Its utility as a screening device may stem from its widespread acceptance as a "socially legitimate" criterion for making such decisions. As a result, employers may believe that using educational attainment to screen employees reduces the possibility of tension arising over employment and promotion decisions. The attractiveness of educational attainment as a screening device may also arise from a belief on the part of employers that it serves as a proxy for attributes or characteristics individuals completing certain numbers of years of school or crossing key transition points in the attainment process will in fact have. For instance,

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17/ Blaug, Mark. Where Are We Now in the Economics of Education? Economics of Education Review, 1985. p. 17-28. Blaug provides an illuminating overview of the various theories that have been put forward in recent years to explain the relationship of educational attainment to employment. This brief discussion is based on Blaug's analysis.

the completion of high school may be assumed by employers to mean either that individuals have attained certain competencies in reading, writing and calculation; that they have the ability to pursue a task, no matter how difficult or unappealing, to its conclusion; or that they have the capacity to learn new skills.

Whether or not attainment measures an individual's actual mastery of cognitive or other skills is an open question. But, the actual time spent in school may be linked to the attributes desired by employers because persons with those attributes are the ones who spend the longest time in school and move farthest through the education pipeline. 18/

18/ Jencks, Christopher, et al. Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America, 1972. p. 135.

V. CHILDREN FROM SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

A. Summary of Findings

The following are among the conclusions reached in this section:

* One out of every four children lives with a single parent. At least 3 of every 5 children born today will at some stage in their childhood live with just one parent.

* In terms of overall representation in the population, black children account for a disproportionately large share of children living in a single-parent family; Hispanic children account for a proportionate share; and white children account for a disproportionately small share.

* Single-parent families are a complex phenomenon. This status is not static; it changes over time. Of importance may be when the child lives in a single-parent family, why, and for how long.

* Overall, children from single-parent families apparently do suffer losses in educational attainment. The direct influence of the absence of a parent on educational outcomes appears small; the indirect influence appears more significant, operating primarily through the effects of depressed income of one-parent families. 19/

19/ In the course of analyzing the educational attainment of these select groups of children and youth, three kinds of effects are distinguished: total, direct, and indirect. These are considered in more detail in Appendix A: Technical Note. Briefly, the total effect measures the extent of the association of one factor or variable (e.g., living in a single-parent family) with another (e.g., educational attainment). The direct effect is that portion of the total effect that occurs in a very immediate manner, without intervening variables. The indirect effect is that portion of the total effect that involves intervening variables (e.g., living in a single-parent family may depress family income, which in turn may adversely affect educational attainment). Thus, living in a single-parent family may have a total effect on educational attainment that is made up of a direct and unmediated effect on attainment and an indirect effect on attainment operating through other factors, such as family income.

* Schools can play a role in the poor educational performance of one-parent children--perhaps exacerbating the children's educational difficulties, or responding effectively to their needs.

B. Statistical Overview

Children living with a single parent may constitute one of the fastest growing populations that our educational system serves. In comparison to their two-parent counterparts, these children are more likely to be black, to be living with a parent who did not finish high school, and to be living in poverty. This subsection presents a brief statistical portrait of the children in one-parent families.

1. Number and Percentage of Children in Single-Parent Families

Children are found increasingly in one-parent families. As shown in the table below, the number of children below the age of 18 living with a single parent rose by more than 6 million between 1970 and 1985. At the same time, the number living with two parents fell by nearly 13 million. In 1970, 85 percent of all children lived with two parents; in 1980, only 77 percent did. This percentage dropped still further to 74 percent in 1985. In that same year, slightly more than 23 percent lived with a single parent and nearly 3 percent lived with neither parent. 20/ Thus, in 1985, of the approximately 62.5 million children under the age of 18, approximately 14.6 million lived with only

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20/ The analysis in this statistical overview is focused on children living with a single parent, not on those living with other adult relatives or nonrelatives.

one parent, almost 1 out of every 4 children. For nearly 90 percent of these children, that remaining parent was their mother. 21/

TABLE 1. Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years
(numbers in thousands)

Living Arrangements of Children	1985	1980	1970
All children under 18 years			
Total	62,475	63,427	69,162
Living with:			
Two parents	46,149	48,624	58,939
One parent	14,635	12,466	8,199
Mother only	13,081	11,406	7,451
Father only	1,554	1,060	748
Neither parent	1,691	2,337	2,024
Percent	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Living with:			
Two parents	73.9	76.7	85.2
One parent	23.4	19.7	11.9
Mother only	20.9	18.0	10.8
Father only	2.5	1.7	1.1
Neither parent	2.7	3.7	2.9

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. Marital Status and Living Arrangements: Mar. 1985. Current Population Reports, series P-20, no. 410, Nov. 1986, table A-8. p. 71; U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. Marital Status and Living Arrangements: Mar. 1984. Current Population Reports, series P-20, no. 399, July 1985, table D. p. 4. Note that changes implemented in 1982 and 1983 to more accurately identify subfamilies within households affect comparison of data for earlier periods with current data.

21/ U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. Marital Status and Living Arrangements: Mar. 1985. Current Population Reports, series P-20, no. 410, Nov. 1986, table A-8. p. 71.

These data fail to capture the full extent to which children may live in a single-parent family during their childhood. Although about 1 out of 4 children in 1985 lived with a single parent, one estimate is that, over their first 17 years of life, 3 of every 5 children born in 1984 will spend some time living with just one parent. 22/

2. Transitions and the Length of Time in a Single-Parent Family

Although a significant percentage of children appear to be born into one-parent families, 23/ many others are likely to experience a change from two-parent to one-parent status at some period in their childhoods. For example, of all children in single-parent families in 1985, 74 percent lived with a family-head who was widowed, married with an absent spouse, or divorced. 24/ Children may make the transition to a single-parent family more often at some ages than at others. For example, divorce involving children is more likely to occur when the children are between the ages of 5 and 12. 25/

Although the length of time individual children spend in one-parent families differs from child to child, there are some data that suggest the general

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22/ Norton, Arthur J., and Paul C. Click. One Parent Families: A Social and Economic Profile. Family Relations, Jan. 1986. p. 16. Higher projections have been made. Sandra L. Hofferth, in Updating Children's Life Course (Journal of Marriage and the Family, Feb. 1985), projected that 70 percent of white children and 95 percent of black children would spend some of their childhood living in single parent families.

23/ For example, in 1984, approximately 21 percent of all births were to unmarried women.

24/ Census, Marital Status and Living Arrangements: Mar. 1985, table A-9, p. 72. The remaining 26 percent lived with a never-married parent.

25/ Consortium for the Study of School Needs of Children from One-Parent Families. The Most Significant Minority: One-Parent Children in the Schools. Sponsored by the Institute for Development of Education Activities, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, July 28, 1980. p. 2.

length of time children might be in such families and the frequency of transitions. For example, the median length of time between first divorce and remarriage in the mid-1970s was 3 years. 26/ Nevertheless, slightly more than 29 percent of divorced adults remained divorced for between 4 and 9 years; and another 12 percent remained divorced for 10 years or more. For unmarried women who bear children, reportedly most will marry within 3 years of giving birth. 27/ But, some of the children in these families experience transitions back to living with a single parent. Within 5 years, 28 percent of the women who bore children out of wedlock and then married will have separated or divorced; within 15 years, slightly more than half (51 percent) will have done so.

3. Marital Status of Single Parents

What portion of children are found in families distinguished by marital status and how has this changed over time? The marital status of the parents of children in one-parent families changed significantly over the course of the last decade and a half. In 1970, only 7 percent of the children in one-parent families could be found with a never-married parent; in 1980, that percentage had more than doubled to 15 percent. This trend is accelerating--in 1984, 24 percent of all single-parent children lived with a never-married parent and, in 1985, 26 percent did so. Divorce also contributed increasingly to the creation of single-parent families over the 1970s. Thirty percent of children in one-parent families in 1970 lived with a divorced parent; in 1980 that percentage

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26/ Census, Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces, table O, p. 14. These data apply to all divorces not just those occurring in families with children.

27/ McCarthy, James and Jane Menken. Marriage, Remarriage, Marital Disruption and Age at First Birth. Family Planning Perspectives, Jan./Feb. 1979, table 1. p. 22.

was 42 percent. The percentage of single-parent children living with a divorced parent has apparently remained stable during the first half of the 1980s. 28/

4. Racial and Ethnic Characteristics of Children in Single-Parent Families

Not only are there different reasons for the absence of a parent, but some kinds of children are more likely to live in single-parent families than are others. As shown in the table below, in 1985, when approximately 74 percent of all children lived with two parents, 80 percent of white children, approximately 40 percent of black children, and about 68 percent of Hispanic children did so. 29/

28/ Census, Marital Status and Living Arrangements: Mar. 1985, table A-9, p. 72; Census, Marital Status and Living Arrangements: Mar. 1984, table D, p. 4.

29/ The terms "Hispanic" and "Spanish-origin" are used interchangeably in this paper to describe persons whose ethnic background is Hispanic.

TABLE 2. Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years in 1985, by Race and Ethnicity*
(numbers in thousands)

	Whites	Blacks	Spanish-origin
Total	50,836	9,479	6,057
Living with:			
Two parents	40,690	3,741	4,110
One parent	9,139	5,113	1,746
Mother only	7,929	4,837	1,612
Father only	1,210	276	134
Neither parent	1,008	625	202
Percent	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Living with:			
Two parents	80.0	39.5	67.9
One parent	18.0	53.9	28.8
Mother only	15.6	51.0	26.6
Father only	2.4	2.9	2.2
Neither parent	2.0	6.6	3.3

* Children of Spanish-origin may be of any race. Figures for blacks and whites include Spanish-origin children.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. Marital Status and Living Arrangements: Mar. 1985. Current Population Reports, series P-20, no. 410, Nov. 1986, table A-8. p. 71.

In terms of their share of the total population of children, black children were overrepresented among children living in one-parent families in 1985 (approximately 15 percent of all children under 18 were black in 1985 and approximately 35 percent of one-parent children were black). Hispanic children accounted for approximately a proportionate share of children in one-parent families (about 10 percent of all children and about 12 percent of children in one-parent families). Whites accounted for a disproportionately smaller share (about 81 percent of all children and about 62 percent of children in one-parent families).

In 1985, 48 percent of the black children in one-parent families were living with a never-married parent. Hispanic children in single-parent families were half as likely to be living with a never-married parent (24 percent did so); and, white children in these families were over two-thirds less likely (13 percent did so). 30/ Reportedly, black children will spend, on average, approximately 59 percent of their childhood in one-parent families, while whites will spend some 31 percent. 31/

5. Educational and Financial Resources of Single-Parent Families

Single-parent families appear to offer their children fewer educational and financial resources than two-parent families. For example, the educational attainment of the heads of single-parent families appears to be less than that of their two-parent counterparts. In 1985, children in one-parent families were nearly twice as likely to living with a parent who had not completed high school as were children in two-parent families. 32/

Educational attainment of the heads of one-parent families did improve significantly over the past decade and a half. A far greater percentage in 1984 had completed a high school diploma--in 1970, 47 percent of one-parent households whose household head was under age 45 with children below age 18 had

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30/ Census, Marital Status and Living Arrangements: Mar. 1985, tables A-8 and A-9, p. 71-72.

31/ Milne, Ann M., et al. Single-Parents, Working Mothers and the Educational Achievement of Elementary School Age Children. Decision Resources. Prepared under subcontract with Systems Development Corporation and the Department of Education, revised June 1983. p. 2. Citing Hofferth, S. L. Updating Children's Life Course. Urban Institute, 1983.

32/ Census, Marital Status and Living Arrangements: Mar. 1985, table 9, p. 51.

not completed high school; in 1984, only 28 percent had not. 33/ But, in relative terms, this improvement in educational attainment may pale when compared to the improvement in two-parent families. The rate of improvement in educational attainment was even greater among the heads of two-parent families over the course of this period--in 1970, 30 percent were not high school graduates; in 1984; only 15 percent failed to complete high school. Also, the rapid rise in the number of one-parent families means that the absolute number of one-parent families headed by a person with less than a high school degree actually grew by 40 percent between 1970 and 1984. 34/

Financial resources are also more limited in single-parent families. In 1984, median income was slightly over $28,000 for two-parent families with their own children below age 18. One-parent families with their own children below 18 had a median income of slightly less than $10,000. One parent-families headed by males had a median income twice that of female-headed families ($19,950 for the former compared to $9,153 for the latter). 35/

The financial weakness of one-parent families is evident when one considers the poverty status of their children. Although a fifth of all children under age 18 are in poverty, over half of the children in one-parent families live in poverty. Fully 60 percent of the single-parent children living with their mothers are in poverty compared to only 26 percent of those living with their fathers. 36/

Longitudinal data allow one to consider the consequences for poverty of living in a single-parent family over the course of childhood. Reportedly, all

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33/ Norton and Glick, One Parent Families, p. 12.

34/ Ibid.

35/ Ibid., p. 14.

36/ Ibid., p. 15.

children, on average, during their first 15 years of life spend about 1.5 years in poverty. 37/ The experience of children living in one-parent families are dramatically different. On average, children who lived all of their first 15 years in one-parent families spent nearly half that time in poverty (7.2 years); children in two-parent families for that entire time experienced less than a year of poverty (0.8 years). For children born to never-married mothers, the average number of years of poverty is 6.2 years out of the first 15 years of life. 38/

All of these figures on poverty experience are influenced by the greater propensity of black children to be found in single-parent families. Black children, in general, have much greater exposure to poverty regardless of family structure. The average number of years of poverty for black children is 5.5 years during the first 15 years of life. The average for blacks living in two-parent families is 4.1 years; for blacks in one-parent families it is 8.0 years.

C. Educational Attainment and Performance

Life in a one-parent family appears to adversely affect children's educational attainment and educational performance (measured by grades, test scores,

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37/ Duncan, Greg J., and Willard L. Rodgers. The Prevalence of Childhood Poverty. Unpublished paper, table 2. Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, Mar. 25, 1986. The figures used in this paragraph are based on the experiences of over 1,000 children who were under the age of 4 in 1968. They were followed for 15 years. The data source is the Panel Study of Income Dynamics.

38/ Thus, a childhood spent totally in a single-parent family leads on average to more years of poverty for children than does birth to a never-married mother. This result may be influenced by the fact that, as noted earlier, a significant portion of never-married mothers do marry. That, in turn, may positively affect family income.

and behavior in school). 39/ Of the total effect on educational attainment, relatively little can be directly attributed to the absence of a parent; substantially more is associated with the income loss that typically accompanies parental absence.

1. The Effect on Educational Attainment

Recent studies and literature reviews conclude that children living with single parents suffer depressed educational attainment and achievement in comparison to children living in two-parent families. 40/ Krein, for example, found that, for a nationally representative sample of men age 28 to 38 in 1980, those who had ever lived in a single-parent family were more than twice as likely to be high school dropouts than were men who had never lived in a

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39/ This analysis applies almost exclusively to life in a female-headed household since the vast majority of the research literature has had that focus and because some 90 percent of all children in one-parent families live with their mother. In addition, much of the literature has addressed the educational attainment and performance of children living with a divorced or separated parent, not a widowed parent or a never-married parent.

40/ Hetherington, E. Mavis, et al. Cognitive Performance, School Behavior, and Achievement of Children from One-Parent Households. Prepared for the Families as Educators Team of the National Institute of Education, 1981. p. 26, 27, 47, 51, 55, 76, 78, 88-98; Shinn, Marybeth. Father Absence and Children's Cognitive Development. Psychological Bulletin, 1978. p. 296-312, 321; Consortium for the Study of School Needs of Children from One-Parent Families. The Most Significant Minority. p. 2, 16; Shaw, Lois B. Does Living in a Single-Parent Family Affect High School Completion for Young Women? Center for Human Resource Research, Ohio State University. Prepared under contract with the Employment and Training Administration of the Department of Labor, Mar. 1979. p. 11; Milne, Ann M., et al. Single-Parents, Working Mothers and the Educational Achievement of Elementary School Age Children. p. 25-26; Myers, David E., et al. Single Parents, Working Mothers and the Educational Achievement of Secondary School Age Children. Decision Resources. Prepared under contract with the Department of Education, June 1983. p. 23, 27; Krein, Sheila Fitzgerald. Growing Up in A Single-Parent Family: The Effect on Education and Earnings of Young Men. Family Relations, Jan. 1986. p. 164, 166; McLanahan, Sara. Family Structure and the Reproduction of Poverty. American Journal of Sociology, Jan. 1985. p. 897-898; Featherman and Hauser, Opportunity and Change, p. 238-252.

single-parent family (27 percent of the former failed to finish high school, while only 12 percent of the latter dropped out). Similarly, successful completion of college was much less likely among those who had ever lived in a single-parent family (only 16 percent of the men from single-parent families had graduated from college or done any graduate work compared to 31 percent of the men who had never lived in a single-parent family). 41/ In terms of the average number of years of schooling completed, Mueller and Cooper determined, in a limited survey of young adults (ages 19 to 31 years of age), that those from two-parent families completed, on average, 1.1 more years of school than did those from single-parent families (13.7 years of school for the two-parent group compared to 12.6 years for the single-parent group). 42/

Many analysts conclude that even after taking into account family income and other background factors, a significant, but small, negative relationship persists, one that is associated with family structure per se. 43/ For example, Featherman and Hauser found that, after accounting for various socioeconomic characteristics, men who lived in one-parent families for most of their

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41/ Krein, Growing Up in a Single-Parent Family, table 1, p. 163.

42/ Mueller, Daniel P., and Philip W. Cooper. Children of Single-Parent Families: How They Fare As Young Adults. Family Relations, Jan. 1986, table 1. p. 172. These data are not nationally representative; they are from a survey of 1 percent of the young adults living in a metropolitan county in the midwest. Available data on white women suggest much the same pattern, while that for black women shows an important difference. Black women have a substantially higher dropout rate even if they always lived in two-parent families. As a result, the adverse effect of life in a single-parent family appears smaller for these women. Shaw found that, of her sample of women 14 to 16 years old in 1968 (and interviewed periodically through 1977), 12.6 percent of the whites and 32.5 percent of the blacks living always in a two-parent family as children were dropouts; 21.8 percent of the whites and 46.6 of the blacks who were ever in a single-parent family were dropouts (Does Living in a Single-Parent Family, table 2, p. 7).

43/ See, for example, Hetherington, et al., Cognitive Performance, p. 51-55, 88-98; Krein, Growing Up in a Single-Parent Family, p. 166-167; Shinn, Father Absence, p. 321; McLanahan, Family Structure, p. 897-898.

first 16 years of life still completed three-fourths of a year less of schooling than men living with two parents. 44/ Krein reported that, overall, for men age 28 to 38 in 1980, living during childhood in a one-parent family was associated with loss of a half year of schooling; for each year in a one-parent family, the number of years of schooling completed fell by one-tenth of a year. 45/

Other analysts have posited that the direct effect of living in a single-parent family is so small as to be insignificant. 46/ According to them, other variables, principally low-income, through which living in a single-parent family indirectly affects educational attainment, account for nearly all of family structure's total effect on attainment.

2. Available Research

Social science confronts major obstacles in its effort to understand the educational consequences for children of living in single-parent families. The complexity of this phenomenon arises for many different reasons, including why a family has a single-parent, when the family enters this status, and for how long the family has only one parent. 47/ As a result of this complexity, the

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44/ As cited in Hetherington, et al., Cognitive Performance, p. 51-55.

45/ Krein, Growing Up in a Single-Parent Family, p. 164.

46/ Milne, et al., Single Parents . . . of Elementary School Age Children, p. 25-26, 29; Mueller and Cooper, Children of Single-Parent Families, p. 171, 175.

47/ See, for example, the analyses in Marino, Cena P., and Richard J. McCowan. The Effects of Parent Absence on Children. Child Study Journal, v. 6, no. 3, 1976. p. 165-182; Herzog, Elizabeth and Cecelia E. Sudia, Children in Fatherless Families. In Review of Child Development Research, Caldwell, Bettye M., and Henry N. Ricciuti, eds. 1973. p. 141-232; Shinn, Father Absence, p. 295-324; Neiman, Jeri A., and Michael E. Connor. One Parent Families: A Study of Short- and Long-Term Families Using Family Climate. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Apr. 1982. 30 p.

extensive research on attainment of children in single-parent families is considered to be seriously flawed. 48/ Perhaps foremost among its deficiencies are its general failure to recognize that parental absence is a dynamic condition, and that family income and parental absence are intricately intertwined. Inadequate data bases also hamper this research. As McLanahan concluded:

> . . . the information needed to separate the various background factors (parents' marital history, family income during childhood and adolescence, timing and duration of disruption) is simply not available in most data sets. As a result, although a great deal of research has been carried out during the past two decades, many of the most critical questions have not been adequately addressed. 49/

Some analysts have called for more thorough and careful utilization of existing longitudinal data bases and development of better ones. 50/

3. Aspects of Single-Parent Families

What is the effect on education of (1) the different reasons that children live in one-parent families, (2) the length of time they live in them, (3) when in their lives they do so, and (4) the race of the children?

Available research deals inadequately with the first of the these variables--the impact of the reasons for the parental absence. 51/ This may result (1) from an assumption in the literature that the single parent status under analysis is a phenomenon primarily occasioned by divorce, (2) from a belief that the differences among causes are inconsequential, (3) from inadequacies in

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48/ Hetherington, et al., Cognitive Performance, p. 3-4, 46-47, 65, 76, 87; Herzog, Children in Fatherless Families, p. 156-158; Shinn, Father Absence, p. 295-296.

49/ McLanahan, Family Structure, p. 874.

50/ Shinn, Father Absence, p. 321.

51/ Hetherington, et al., Cognitive Performance, p. 3.

available sources of data for the required detailed analyses, or (4) the primacy of other issues in the research agenda.

Some reviews of the literature have found no conclusive evidence that duration has an effect. 52/ Nevertheless, certain analyses on the length of time spent in single-parent families suggest that it may indeed be significant, at least for different populations, such as males and black adolescent females. 53/

Some of the available data prove suggestive that the particular period of a child's life spent in a single-parent family may be significant in terms of educational outcomes. 54/ The preschool period and, perhaps, the elementary school period, emerge as the times when the single parent experience may have the most negative consequences for educational outcomes.

Life in a single-parent family may have a different impact on children depending upon their race. Unfortunately the direction of that impact is not clear. Some research finds that black children are not disadvantaged by single-parent status. 55/ Other research concludes that black children suffer disproportionately by living in one-parent families. 56/ The issue is clouded

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52/ Ibid., p. 65; Shinn, Father Absence, p. 312 (but on p. 321 Shinn posits that longer amounts of time in a one-parent family depress academic performance).

53/ Krein, Growing Up, p. 166; Shaw, Does Living in a Single-Parent Family, p. 10. The negative effect for black adolescent females found by Shaw is significant when the duration in a one-parent family is greater than 2 years.

54/ Krein, Growing Up, p. 166; Marino and McCowan, The Effects of Parent Absence, p. 166.

55/ Hetherington, et al., Cognitive Performance, p. 77; Shinn, Father Absence, p. 313.

56/ Milne, et al., Single Parents . . . of Elementary School Age Children, p. 26; Shaw, Does Living in a Single-Parent Family, p. 10.

somewhat because race is closely associated with family structure, income levels, and educational outcomes.

4. Schools and the Children from Single-Parent Families

A final area of exploration is the interaction of single parents and their children with schools. Relevant research suggest that educational attainment may be a function, not only of the effects of life in a single-parent family on the children, but also of how educational institutions treat these children. In this regard, the effect of living in a single-parent family on children's behavior must be considered.

Children from one-parent families appear to exhibit unacceptable in-school behavior more often than their two-parent counterparts. Reportedly they are more likely to be absent, late, truant, excessively aggressive in class, and mobile, that is, frequently change schools. 57/ It appears that this behavior may be associated with changes in the family where a family is making the transition from two-parent status to one-parent status. Children may respond to the stress of their family situation by engaging in behavior viewed as inappropriate within the classroom. There is some debate about whether this effect on behavior is short-lived, occurring only around the time of changes in the family and shortly thereafter, or recurrent and affecting behavior at later points in time.

57/ Hammond, Janice M. Children of Divorce: A Study of Self-Concept, Academic Achievement, and Attitudes. The Elementary School Journal, Nov. 1979. p. 57; Consortium for the Study of School Needs of Children from One-Parent Families, The Most Significant Minority, p. 7-8, 12-16; Zakariya, Sally Bank. Another Look at the Children of Divorce: Summary Report of the Study of School Needs of One-Parent Children. Principal, Sept. 1982. p. 36-37.

At the same time, there is evidence that schools in general may respond to the problem behavior of such children in ways that are more negative than warranted. Hetherington, et al., suggested that schools do not give one-parent children the "benefit of the doubt." 58/ Teachers may anticipate negative behavior from one-parent children, or deal inappropriately with their behavior. 59/ One literature review found a much more consistently negative impact of living in single-parent families on children's grades than on their achievement test scores. 60/ Thus, in this analysis, the measure most directly influenced by the interaction between student and teacher--grades--was more adversely affected than was a measure more likely to be free of non-academic concerns--achievement test scores. This finding receives support from a study of education in the early grades that suggests grades given by teachers are more likely to reflect poor behavior or lowered motivation than are standardized tests; and that pupil conduct influences teachers' responses, but does not interfere with learning. 61/

58/ Hetherington, et al., Cognitive Performance, p. 79.

59/ Santrock, John W., and Russel L. Tracy. Effects of Children's Family Structure Status on the Development of Stereotypes by Teachers. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1978. p. 757. But, see Duskek, Jerome B., and Gail Joseph. The Bases of Teacher Expectancies: A Meta-Analysis. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1983. p. 341 (concludes that children from single-parent families do not trigger negative expectations from teachers).

60/ Hetherington, et al., Cognitive Performance, p. 47, 89.

61/ Entwisle, Doris R., and Leslie Alec Hayduk. Early Schooling: Cognitive and Affective Outcomes, 1982. p. 157.

Recent research on educational achievement posits that parental involvement in the education of their children has positive consequences for educational performance. 62/ At the same time, there is evidence that single-parents find it difficult to participate in their children's education to the full extent they want because schools have not been sensitive to their time and resource constraints. 63/ Among the complaints from single parents are that schools schedule events as though each family contains two parents, only one of whom works, and that school staff may have negative expectations of single parents and their children. 64/ Clay recommended that schools take or consider several steps to respond to the concerns of single parents and their relationship to their children's schools. Among these steps are the following:

(1) be more flexible in arranging parent conferences;

(2) provide staff with in-service training in ways of responding to single parents and their children, and in dealing with negative expectations the staff may have about these children and their families;

(3) consider providing child care both before and after school;

(4) arrange adequate transportation to permit children from single-parent families to participate in the full range of school events; and,

(5) work with single parents in dealing with in-school behavior problems.

62/ Henderson, Anne, ed. Parent Participation--Student Achievement: The Evidence Grows. National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1981. 70 p.

63/ Clay, Phyllis L. Single-Parents and the Public Schools: How Does the Partnership Work? National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1981. 77 p.

64/ Clay, Single Parents, p. 29-32, 49-55.

5. Policy Questions

Clearly the ways in which parental absence may influence educational attainment are extremely complicated. Precisely how the absence of a parent works to affect the educational attainment and achievement of children remains obscure, in part because of the entangled relationship between income and family structure. This raises key questions for public policy formation. Can and should one act before delineating the process through which living in a single-parent family affects attainment? To what extent do current Federal programs for at risk children and youth (e.g., Head Start and Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981) reflect and address the attainment issues analyzed above? How might they? If the effect on attainment of living in a single-parent family is primarily felt through depressed family income, how much should policy focus on buttressing the finances of one-parent families? If, as the research suggests, it is not income alone that accounts for depressed attainment, should public policy address other issues, such as how the family functions? Can these and other issues be addressed singly or are they inseparable, requiring multi-faceted, but coordinated policies?

VI. CHILDREN FROM PERSISTENTLY POOR FAMILIES

A. Summary of Findings

Among the conclusions reached by the analysis below of the educational attainment of children from persistently poor families are the following:

* In 1985, 20 percent of all children lived in families with income below the poverty threshold. Nearly half of all black children, somewhat more than a third of the Hispanic children, and less than a fifth of white children lived in poverty.

* Persistent poverty (defined as living in poverty for at least two-thirds of the first 15 years of childhood) may be the lot of 5 percent of all children, and more than a quarter of all black children.

* Depressed educational attainment is significantly associated with poverty and persistent poverty. Children in poverty may be twice as likely to be enrolled below their expected modal grade than non-poverty children. 65/

* School policies and practices, such as tracking, may account for a portion of the depressed attainment experienced by poor children and, by extension, persistently poor children.

B. Statistical Overview

As shown in the table below, over 12 million children under the age of 18 years lived in families whose income fell below the official poverty level in

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65/ A child's modal grade in school is that grade in which the majority of the children of his or her age are found.

1985. 66/ This means that about 1 out of every 5 children lived in a poor family in that year. The number of children living below the poverty level rose by over 2 million, or 22 percent, between 1970 and 1985. A greater percentage of children were in poverty in 1985 than in either 1980 or 1970.

TABLE 3. Children in Poverty
(numbers in thousands)

Related children under 18 years of age in families	1985	1980	1970
Total number in poverty	12,483	11,114	10,235
White children	7,838	6,817	6,138
Black children	4,057	3,906	3,922
Spanish-origin children*	2,512	1,718	(N/A)
Percentage in poverty	20.1%	17.9%	14.9%
White children	15.6	13.4	10.5
Black children	43.1	42.1	41.5
Spanish-origin children*	39.6	33.0	(N/A)

* Spanish-origin children may be of any race. Figures for blacks and whites include Spanish-origin children.

N/A = not available.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Money Income and Poverty Status of Families and Persons in the United States: 1985. Current Population Reports, series P-60, no. 154, Aug. 1986, table 16. p. 22. Note that children living in unrelated subfamilies (i.e., families living with an unrelated householder) are not included in this table.

In 1985, poverty rates differed dramatically by race and ethnicity. The poverty rate for white children was 15.6 percent; for black children it was 43.1 percent; and for children of Spanish-origin (who may of any race) it was

66/ Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. Money Income and Poverty Status of Families and Persons in the United States: 1985. Current Population Report, series P-60, no. 154, Aug. 1986, table 16. p. 22. The average poverty threshold for a family of 4 was $10,989 in 1985 (p. 33).

39.6 percent. At the same time, more white children than black or Hispanic children were living in poverty in each of the years shown in this table. In 1985, approximately 63 percent of the children in poverty were white and 33 percent were black. Hispanics constituted approximately 20 percent of poor children in that year.

The "snapshot" of the poverty status of children provided above fails to depict the full extent to which children experience poverty. Longitudinal data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) show that, during their first 15 years of life (covering the period 1968 to 1983), about 1 out of every 3 children will live in poverty for at least 1 year. 67/ About 1 out of every 14 children will be poor for between 5 and 9 years of their childhood, and nearly 1 out of 20 could be deemed persistently poor, that is, they live in poverty for at least 10 of their first 15 years.

Duncan and Rodgers distinguished black children from all other children and found that any experience with poverty is more common for black children. 68/ One quarter (25 percent) of all non-black children experience at least 1 year of poverty over their first 15 years of life, but over three-quarters (79 percent) of all black children live in poverty at some time. 69/ Focusing on persistent poverty, the racial differences emerge more clearly. Less than one one-hundredth (.6 percent) of all non-black children are poor for 10 or more of their first 15 years, while more than a quarter (29 percent) of black children are. Duncan and Rodgers conclude:

67/ U. S. Congress. House. Committee on Ways and Means. Children in Poverty. Committee Print WMCP: 99-8, 99th Cong., 1st Sess. Prepared by the Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress and the Congressional Budget Office. p. 43-44.

68/ Duncan and Rodgers, The Prevalence of Childhood Poverty, table 1, unnumbered page.

69/ Ibid.

> Nearly half of the children in the United States find themselves in a vulnerable economic position at least once during their childhood; about one-third actually fall below the official poverty line. Persistent poverty is a way of life for two-and-a-half million children under age 15 today, and intermittent poverty characterizes the lives of an additional three-and-a-half million children. 70/

Family structure is linked to this racial difference in poverty. Although even living in a family with two parents for all of childhood is no guarantee of escaping poverty for black children (who experience an average of 4.1 years in poverty), having only one parent for the full 15 year period nearly doubles the average number of years in poverty for black children (8.0 years). 71/ Living in a single-parent family more than quadruples the number of poverty years for non-black children (from .6 years to 2.7 years). Nevertheless, living in a single-parent family does not fully account for black children's exposure to poverty--black children living with two parents still experience over 50 percent more years of poverty than do non-black children living with a single parent.

C. Educational Attainment and Performance

1. General Effects of Persistent Poverty on Attainment

Available research results suggests that poverty and persistence in poverty are related to children's educational attainment and performance. Chaikind found that the percentage of children enrolled below modal grade at ages 16 or

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70/ Ibid., p. 17 (emphasis added).

71/ Ibid., table 2.

18 increased significantly when they had spent relatively long periods in poverty during childhood. 72/ For example, 16 year olds who had spent 8 or more years in poverty during childhood were almost twice as likely to be found enrolled below modal grade than were children who had spent 2 or fewer years in poverty during their childhood (42.2 percent as compared to 21.4 percent).

Even after accounting for other factors, such as race and family structure, the influence of poverty status is apparent. Bianchi found that the poverty status was significantly related to enrollment below modal grade. 73/ For example, for a black two-parent household with income above the poverty level, male children have a 19.2 percent probability of being enrolled below modal grade, while females have an 11.9 percent probability. 74/ For this same family with income below the poverty threshold, the probability nearly doubles, rising to 33.0 percent for male children and 21.9 percent for female children. This relative increase in probability of below modal grade enrollment is found for children from white and Hispanic families, as well.

Although not a direct measure of educational attainment, enrollment below modal grade is a useful indicator of the likelihood that students will not go as far in school as their peers. Research suggests that enrollment below modal grade is a key predictor of whether a student will fail to complete high

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72/ Chaikind, Stephen. The Effects of Short-Term and Long-Term Poverty on Educational Attainment of Children, appears in Appendix D: Support for Chapter 2. In Kennedy, Mary M., et al. Poverty, Achievement and the Distribution of Compensatory Education Services. Interim report from the National Assessment of Chapter 1. Department of Education. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Jan. 1986, table 2. p. D-6.

73/ Bianchi, Children's Progress Through School, table 4, p. 190.

74/ The predicted probabilities are for a child living in a family with the following characteristics: two parents, mother with a high school education, mother working only part-time or not at all, at least two other children in the home (one older and one younger). (Bianchi, Children's Progress Through School, note a, table 4, p. 190.)

school. 75/ Nevertheless, one should note that enrollment below modal grade has certain limitations--students can be found either at or below modal grade for a wide range of reasons, not all of which are related to academic performance; enrollment below modal grade need not invariably lead to loss of educational attainment; and, enrollment at modal grade does not preclude eventual loss of educational attainment.

Researchers who have modeled the relationship between income and educational attainment (measured in years of school completed) have made different estimates of the strength of the relationship. For example, Jencks, et al.'s estimate of the relationship between parental income and educational attainment suggests that about 20 percent of differences in attainment can be accounted for by parental income. 76/ Sewell and Hauser found income alone to account for very little of the difference (7 percent) in educational attainment of the population they analyzed. 77/

Still it must be stressed that assessment of the impact of relative levels of family income differs from consideration of the effects of living in poverty. The former considers how changes in family income affect attainment; the latter focuses on the consequences of family income reaching or falling below the poverty level. By definition, income at or below the poverty level is

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75/ Hess, G. Alfred, Jr., and Diana Lauber. Dropouts from the Chicago Public Schools. Chicago Panel on Public School Finances, Apr. 24, 1985, second printing May 30, 1986.

76/ Jencks, et al. Inequality, note 4, p. 161. The correlation estimated by Jencks, et al. was squared to estimate the variance accounted for by family income. The population to which this estimate applies is white, nonfarm males.

77/ Sewell, William H., and Robert M. Hauser. Causes and Consequences of Higher Education: Models of the Status Attainment Process. In Schooling and Achievement in American Society, Sewell, William H., et al., eds., 1976, table 1.1. p. 17. Estimate of variance in educational attainment accounted for by family income calculated by squaring the correlation in table 1.1. The population being analyzed by Sewell and Hauser consisted of male Wisconsin high school graduates of 1957 from nonfarm backgrounds.

deemed inadequate for a family. Thus decreases in family income that bring a family down to or below the poverty threshold may have consequences for children's educational attainment that differ from the consequences of income decreases that do not bring a family into poverty. It should also be stressed that not all poverty experiences may have the same effect. As Kennedy, et al. conclude:

> The official poverty status of a family is one of number of family characteristics associated with student achievement. However, it is not the most frequently associated nor necessarily the most strongly associated with student achievement. The uneven association between this measure of family poverty and student achievement could result from the fact that families differ considerably in the reasons they are poor and in the length of time they are poor. 78/

2. Data Limitations

It appears that much of the research assessing the relationship between the length of time a child lives in poverty and educational attainment has substantial limitations for the purposes of the present analysis. Although many researchers have explored the extent to which a child's family income is linked to various measures of educational attainment, 79/ they have generally done so in ways that fail to address this paper's concern with the persistence of the poverty experience. The limitations of the available research include the use of "snapshot" data depicting family income at a single point in time, not income trends over time; the merging of income data with other data when

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78/ Kennedy, Mary M., et al. Poverty, Achievement and the Distribution of Compensatory Education Services (emphasis added). p. 15.

79/ See, for example, White, Karl R. The Relation Between Socioeconomic Status and Academic Achievement. Psychological Bulletin, 1982. p. 461-481; Wolf, Alison. The Relationship Between Poverty and Achievement. Compensatory Education Study. National Institute of Education, Dec. 1977. 25 p.; Jencks, et al., Inequality; Jencks, et al., Who Gets Ahead?; Sewell, et al., eds., Schooling and Achievement in American Society, 1976; Featherman and Hauser, Opportunity and Change, 1978; Bianchi, Children's Progress Through School.

assessing socioeconomic status; the use of other variables, such as father's occupation status, as substitutes for information on family income.

3. School Factors

Given current data limitations, the discussion below generally does not address the relationship of schools to persistently poor students. Rather it draws on research focusing on low-income children and youth to suggest ways in which schools might interact with persistently poor students.

The research that models persons' educational and occupation status attainment often reports that persons' socioeconomic background, including family income or poverty status, has a relatively limited direct impact on educational attainment. Other factors, particularly school-based ones, seem to be important. According to Alexander and Eckland:

> . . . high status youth go further in school, on average, than their equally capable but lower status counterparts largely because: 1) they more often aspire to and/or expect to go further, that is, they seemingly are more highly motivated; 2) they are more likely to be enrolled in a college-preparatory high school curriculum, and hence to benefit from the credentials, coursework, and organizational facilitation that accompanies such track placement; and 3) they are more involved in social relations and networks that are supportive of college-going aspirations. 80/

In comparison with high-income students, students with low family income are more likely to end up in the general and vocational tracks, rather than the

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80/ Alexander and Eckland, The Explorations in Equality of Opportunity Survey, p. 41-42. See, also, Sewell and Hauser, Causes and Consequences of Higher Education, p. 21.

academic track. 81/ Of importance is the role that schools might play in directing students from poor families into particular tracks. The tracks that students enter have important consequences. For example, they affect the kinds of courses students can and do take, and the probability of students continuing their education beyond high school. 82/

Some analysts have found that when schools serve areas with a concentration of children and youth from poverty families, they may be less able to raise the achievement levels of these children. 83/ Conceivably, the schools become less effective as the proportion of their students who come from poverty level families rises. This phenomenon suggests that the achievement levels of poor children may be affected by what goes on in school or by the kinds of

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81/ Carrol, C. Dennis and Carlyle E. Maw. High School and Beyond Tabulation: Crosstabulation of Classification Categories for High School Seniors. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Longitudinal Studies Branch, LSB 86-1-22, table 17. This discussion deals primarily with the sorting of students at the secondary school level. High school tracks are typically designated academic, vocational, and general. The academic track is often described as offering college preparatory courses and experiences. The vocational and general are viewed as generally intended for lower ability students whose post-high school plans are primarily focused on work. Although not employing these labels, elementary schools also sort students on a variety of criteria, including ability. For 1980 high school seniors with annual family income of less than $7,000, 26 percent were in the academic track and 71 percent were in the general or vocational tracks (3 percent were missing data). For seniors with family income above $38,000, 55 percent were in the academic track and 44 percent were in the general or vocational tracks (1 percent were missing data).

82/ Alexander and Eckland, The Explorations in Equality of Opportunity Survey, p. 41-42; Oakes, Jeannie. Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality, 1985.

83/ For a review of some of this literature, see U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Changes in the Rate of Child Poverty: Possible Implications for Chapter 1, Education and Consolidation and Improvement Act. Report No. 86-773 EPW, by Wayne C. Riddle, July 10, 1986. p. 18-21.

students an individual child associates with. This has been extensively considered in the effective schools research. 84/ In addition, as with the children from single-parent families, some have posited that school personnel may react negatively to children from low-income families, possibly affecting their educational achievement and attainment. 85/

84/ U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. The Effective Schools Research: Content and Criticisms. Report No. 85-1122 EPW, by James B. Stedman, Dec. 18, 1985.

85/ See discussion in Benson, Charles S. Household Production of Human Capital: Time Uses of Parents and Children as Inputs. In Financing Education: Overcoming Inefficiency and Inequity, McMahon, Walter W., and Terry G. Geske, eds., 1982. p. 53-54.

VII. CHILDBEARING TEENAGERS

A. Summary of Findings

The conclusions reached in this section include the following:

* In 1984, 5 percent of teenage women had children; 56 percent of the childbearing teens were unmarried. Overall, birth rates for teenage women are declining; those for unmarried teens are rising.

* The birth rate for black teenage women is more than double that for white teenage women. But the rate at which white teenagers are bearing children out of wedlock has increased since 1972; the rate for black teenagers has shown modest decline.

* The educational attainment of teenage mothers is less than that of their non-parenting peers. As a group, they may complete at least 20 percent fewer years of schooling.

* Childbirth does not preclude further education. Many teen mothers remain in, or return to, high school after giving birth.

* The impact of childbirth on educational attainment is different depending upon the race of the mother. White teenage mothers suffer greater losses than do black teenage mothers.

* A portion of the lowered educational attainment among childbearing teens may result from conditions existing prior to the birth of children. For example, teenage mothers as a group tend to have poorer socioeconomic backgrounds than other female teenagers and to be more likely to have a poor academic history.

B. Statistical Overview 86/

As shown in the table below, there were 51 births in 1984 for every 1,000 teenage women (ages 15-19), resulting in a total of approximately 470,000 births to teens. 87/ Approximately 5 percent of teenage women gave birth in 1984; approximately 56 percent of these teenage women were unmarried.

TABLE 4. Births to Teenage Women (Ages 15-19 Years)

	1984	1972
Total number of births	469,682	616,280
White	320,953	433,986
Black	134,392	172,349
Birth rate per 1,000 women	50.9%	62.0%
White	42.5	51.0
Black	95.7	130.8
Number of births to unmarried women	261,104	202,300
White	133,275	78,600
Black	119,742	119,900
Birth rate per 1,000 unmarried women	30.2%	22.9%
White	19.0	10.5
Black	87.1	98.8

NOTE: Hispanic women are included in both the white and black categories above.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, as cited in U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Teenage Pregnancy: Issues and Legislation in the 100th Congress. Issue Brief No. IB86128, by Sharon Stephan (updated regularly).

86/ For detailed data, see U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Teenage Pregnancy and Childbearing: Incidence Data. Report No. 87-11 EPW, by Sharon Stephan, Jan. 9, 1987.

87/ U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Teenage Pregnancy: Issues and Legislation. Issue Brief No. IB86128, by Sharon Stephan (updated regularly). Unless otherwise noted, the data in this subsection are derived from this issue brief.

In the national debate over the causes, consequences, and appropriate ways to respond to pregnant and teenagers with children, it frequently has not been made clear that birth rates for teenage women have in fact been on the decline for the past 3 decades. During the past decade, the birth rate per 1,000 teen women dropped by 18 percent, from 62 births to 51 births; while the number of births dropped 24 percent, from 616,000 to 470,000. The larger percentage decline for the absolute number of births is due to the shrinking of the female 15-19 year old cohort by 7 percent over the period.

Not all teenage birth trends are in decline. Increasingly, children are being born to unmarried teenagers, with 29 percent more births to unmarried teens in 1984 than in 1972. The percentage share of births to teens that occurred to unmarried teens rose from 33 percent to 56 percent in this same time period.

Racial differences are particularly prominent. In 1984, the birth rate for black teenage women was more than twice that for white teenage women (96 births per 1,000 black teenage women compared to 43 births per 1000 white teenage women). The vast majority (89 percent) of these black teenage mothers are unmarried. In contrast, fewer than half (42 percent) of the white teenage births were to unmarried women. Significantly, the growth in unmarried births has occurred only among unmarried white teens. Between 1972 and 1984, the birth rate for white unmarried teens rose from 11 births per 1,000 women to 19 births per 1,000, an 81 percent growth. The rate for black unmarried teens dropped by 12 percent from 99 births per 1,000 to 87 births per 1,000.

C. Educational Attainment and Performance

Parenthood appears to have negative consequences for the educational attainment of teenage women. 88/ The analysis below is focused on identifying the educational consequences of childbirth for teens.

1. Overall Effect on Attainment

As with the other groups under analysis, estimates of the effects of being a teenage mother are substantially influenced by the extent to which other factors that might affect attainment are considered. When the joint effects of other factors are not considered, one finds that the number of years of schooling for women between the age of 20 and 40 years who had their first child by age 17 is about 25 to 30 percent lower than it is for women who postponed childbirth. 89/ From data derived by Moore and Waite, it can be estimated that women aged 24 years who had their first child between ages 16 and 17 years had completed, on average, 3 fewer years of school than 24 year olds who had had no children (10.5 years as compared to 13.5 years). 90/ Taking into account the

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88/ This analysis does not distinguish between married and unmarried teenagers who give birth.

89/ Statistic derived from McCarthy, James and Ellen S. Radish. Education and Childbearing Among Teenagers. Family Planning Perspectives, May/June 1982, table 1. p. 154. See also, Moore, Kristin A., and Linda J. Waite. Early Childbearing and Educational Attainment. Family Planning Perspectives, Sept./Oct. 1977. p. 220-225; Waite, Linda J., and Kristin A. Moore. The Impact of an Early First Birth on Young Women's Educational Attainment. Social Forces, Mar. 1978. p. 845-865.

90/ Moore and Waite, Early Childbearing and Educational Attainment, table 1, p. 222.

influence of factors such as parental education, parents' educational aspirations for children, and occupation of the head of household, apparently reduces the difference in years completed by half, to 1.4 years. 91/

The loss in educational attainment appears to be substantially greater the younger the teenager is when she has a child. 92/ Moore and Waite show that, at age 24 years, women who had a child at or before 15 years of age completed an average of 8.9 years of schooling, 1.6 years fewer than those who had a child at ages 16 and 17 years, 2.4 years fewer than those who first gave birth at age 18 years, and 4.6 years fewer than those who had not given birth by age 24 years. This relationship remains when socioeconomic variables are taken into account.

2. Leaving or Staying in School

Nevertheless, teenage childbearers do not invariably leave school en mass when they become pregnant or after having a child. A significant portion remain or return to school after interruptions for delivery of the infant. For example, Furstenberg, in his longitudinal analysis of the experiences of a small sample of poor, black Baltimore teen mothers, reported that 70 percent of his sample returned to school after childbirth and nearly half completed high school. 93/

The impact on school enrollment of childbirth has been changing in recent years. Over the course of the 1970s, it became increasingly common for teen

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91/ Ibid., table 2, p. 223.

92/ Ibid., table 1, p. 222.

93/ Furstenberg, Frank F. The Social Consequences of Teenage Parenthood. Family Planning Perspectives, July/Aug. 1976. p. 159-160.

mothers to remain or return to school. 94/ In 1968, only 5 percent of white teenage mothers were still enrolled in school 9 months after giving birth; in 1979, 17 percent were. The increase for black teenage mothers between 1968 and 1979 was from 15 percent to 39 percent. If one focuses only on the enrollment status of women who had not graduated from high school, the persistence in school of teenage women who give birth is even greater. Based on data compiled by Mott and Maxwell, it is estimated that in 1979 some 24 percent of the white women and 45 percent of the black women who had not yet finished high school were still enrolled 9 months after giving birth. 95/

With regard to high school completion, Mott and Marsiglio, utilizing nationally representative longitudinal data, found that 56 percent of the women who gave birth before leaving high school did earn their high school diplomas and an additional 8 percent received GED (General Educational Development) high school equivalency certificates by the time they were 20 to 26 years of age. 96/ According to their data, 92 percent of women who did not bear children completed high school diplomas and an additional 3 percent received a GED. Thus, despite a significantly increasing propensity for returning or remaining in school after giving birth, teenagers who do give birth while in school appear substantially less likely to graduate from high school or secure a GED.

94/ Mott, Frank L., and Nan L. Maxwell. School-Age Mothers: 1968 and 1979. Family Planning Perspectives, Nov./Dec. 1981. p. 287-292. See table 1, p. 288, in particular.

95/ Estimates derived from Mott and Maxwell, School-Age Mothers: 1968 and 1979, table 1, p. 288.

96/ Mott, Frank L., and William Marsiglio. Early Childbearing and Completion of High School. Family Planning Perspectives, Sept./Oct. 1985. p. 234-237.

3. Racial Differences

Having a child during the teenage years appears to have relatively less of a negative effect overall for black women than for white women. Racial differences in the consequences for women's educational attainment of having children while in the teenage years are evident. For example, without considering the impact of other factors, the data assembled by Moore and Waite show that blacks who gave birth between ages 16 and 17 years had completed 1.9 fewer years of school by age 24 than black women who had not given birth by age 24 years. 97/ In contrast, the negative effect on attainment of teenage childbirth by white women was 68 percent greater than for blacks. By age 24 years, white women who gave birth between ages 16 and 17 years lost 3.2 years of school compared to white women who did not give birth. When several background factors were taken into account, the loss for black women fell to about .7 years of school; white women still lost over twice as much, about 1.5 years. 98/

Race and educational attainment appear closely interrelated in analyses of the effects of teenage childbearing. The educational attainment of women at age 24 years who have never had children differs markedly by race--13.7 years for whites and only 12.0 for blacks. White women who had a child at 16 or 17 years of age completed 10.5 years of school while black women who gave birth at the same age completed on average almost the same number of years, 10.1. 99/ Significantly, although total attainment appears to be depressed, childbearing

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97/ Moore and Waite, Early Childbearing and Educational Attainment, table 1, p. 222.

98/ Ibid., table 3, p. 224. It should be noted that the attainment losses for blacks depicted in table 3 are not significant. Also, the data presented in the text compares women who had children as 16 and 17 years with women at the extreme--those who had never given birth. The difference in educational attainment between the former and women who gave birth in their very early twenties might be smaller.

99/ Ibid., table 1, p. 222.

black women appear to be no less likely than childbearing white women to finish high school. Childbearing Hispanics, in contrast, failed to finish high school more often than either blacks or whites. 100/

4. Academic Performance

One must consider whether the birth of a child per se depresses educational attainment, or is simply an action more likely to characterize students who will attain fewer years of school regardless of giving birth. Available research is not conclusive, but the evidence suggests that childbirth has a unique and directly negative effect on educational attainment, particularly for very young teenagers. Moore and Waite assert that:

> . . . early childbearing is strongly associated with a lower level of educational attainment, especially among young women attending school at the time of the birth of their first child, even when other factors known to affect educational attainment are taken into account. 101/

Some other research suggests that teenagers who become pregnant and who become parents differ from nonparenting teens to such an extent that, possibly even in the absence of childbirth, they would have had depressed educational outcomes. 102/ Early family formers were found to be below average students,

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100/ Mott and Marsiglio, Early Childbearing and Completion of High School, table 1, p. 235, 237.

101/ Moore and Waite, Early Childbearing and Educational Attainment, p. 225.

102/ Haggstrom, Gus W., et al. Teenage Parents: Their Ambitions and Attainments. The Rand Corporation. Prepared for the National Institutes of Health. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, R-2771-NICHD, July 1981. p. 177; Children's Defense Fund. Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy: What Schools Can Do, Sept. 1986. p. 4-5. It should be noted that the Rand analysis suffers from a number of limitations--the data base upon which it drew poorly captures whether an individual has had a child; the data described a sample of high school seniors thus missing individuals who dropped out prior to their senior year; the study's controls may have been inadequate (it does not appear that the researchers compared the experiences of nonparenting teens with educational aspirations similar to those of the parenting teens).

enrolled more frequently in nonacademic programs, coming from families with lower socioeconomic status, and having low educational and career aspirations. Haggstrom, et al. concluded:

> . . . future studies that seek to assess the consequences of parenthood should attempt to measure preexisting differences as precisely as possible, since most differences in outcomes appear to be related to those differences. 103/

5. The Role of Schools

Finally, what of the role that schools might play in affecting the educational attainment of teenage mothers? The literature suggests that although schools can play important positive roles in terms of the educational attainment of these teens, relatively few of them do. Those that attempt to do so unevenly address students' academic needs, if at all, a critical finding in light of the perception by some observers that a root cause of the pregnancy problem lies with academic failure.

According to recent reports, school systems across the country generally do not have specific programs intended to keep pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers in school. 104/ Indeed, it appears that school districts may be reluctant to pursue active programs in this area, in part because of the potential financial costs associated with these efforts and because of the controversy such action may generate. 105/

103/ Ibid., p. 178.

104/ Adler, Emily Stier, et al. Educational Policies and Programs for Teenage Parents and Pregnant Teenagers. Family Relations, Apr. 1985. p. 183-187; Zellman, Gail L. The Response of the Schools to Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood. The Rand Corporation. Prepared for the National Institute of Education, R-2759-NIE; Zellman, Gail L. Public School Programs for Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenthood: An Assessment. Family Planning Perspectives, Jan./Feb. 1982. p. 15-21.

105/ Zellman, The Response of the Schools, p. 104.

At the same time, students' pregnancy or childbirth has generated issues that school systems cannot ignore. For instance, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (P.L. 92-318) prohibits discrimination against students on the basis of their pregnancy status in federally funded programs or activities. 106/ According to some observers, the implementation of Title IX coupled with changing attitudes toward teenage pregnancy and parenthood may have resulted in students growing markedly less likely to end their education upon becoming pregnant or becoming a parent. 107/ There appears to be little evidence suggesting that this greater likelihood of staying in school can be attributed to the implementation of school programs designed to retain teenagers who have children.

Even when a school system has a program to address the needs of pregnant teens or teenage mothers, it is unlikely to offer the range of academic and personal services perhaps necessary to positively influence the decision to stay in school. These programs frequently do not addresses the academic needs of such teens nor do they directly influence their decisions concerning continuation in school. 108/ Some observers have concluded that the focus of these programs and their primary services may be less than needed to affect schooling decisions. The primary focus of current programs is likely to be on the period of the pregnancy. During that time these programs reportedly make "excellent" efforts at providing information about pregnancy and parenting. 109/ The academic aspects of the programs serving teens during their pregnancies are

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106/ Zellman, Gail L. Title IX Perspective on the Schools' Response to Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood. The Rand Corporation. Prepared for the Office for Civil Rights, R-2767-OCR, Apr. 1981.

107/ Mott and Maxwell, School-Age Mothers: 1968 and 1979, p. 289.

108/ Zellman, The Response of the Schools, p. 94-95; Adler, et al., Education Policies and Programs, p. 187.

109/ Zellman, Public School Programs, p. 21.

inconsistent, with most offering no academic assistance and some providing poor academic instruction. 110/ The post-birth period apparently witnesses an abrupt cessation of school services to most of these teens. 111/

The issue of the academic needs of pregnant teens and teenage mothers merits additional consideration. As suggested earlier, teens who become pregnant and give birth appear to have had, prior to the pregnancy, a constellation of characteristics putting them at greater risk for dropping out, whether or not they conceived and delivered. It has been argued that the chain of events leading to pregnancy and parenting by teens may begin with poor academic skills and limited expectations for the future. As a result, the primary role for schools may be to address the academic deficiencies of these students. 112/ By acquiring better academic skills, it is posited that students may delay parenthood and be better able to fashion an economically and socially productive future. 113/ Thus, when schools are more successful academically with a broader range of their students, they may, according to this argument, reduce the propensity of students to become pregnant or parents. To the extent that pregnant teens or teenager mothers are motivated to drop out of school by academic failure, efforts to address academic needs may be useful. At the same time, it would appear that teenagers who are pregnant or who have children also have nonacademic needs, such as those directly involving the care of their children. Successful efforts for them may also need to be more broadly based. 114/

110/ Ibid., p. 21.

111/ Ibid., p. 20.

112/ Children's Defense Fund, Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy, p. 5-6.

113/ Ibid.

114/ For a model of such a program, see A Comprehensive and Integrated Model of Services for School-Age Parents and Their Families: Summary of Contents. Michigan Department of Education, no date.

VIII. CONCLUSION

At the outset of this paper three questions were posited:

(1) Are children and youth from single-parent families, those from persistently poor families, and teenagers who give birth at risk of depressed educational attainment?

(2) How might these characteristics lead to depressed educational attainment?

(3) What implications does the current research have for examining Federal responses to the educational needs of these children and youth?

In this concluding section the answers that the preceding analysis offers for each of those questions are considered.

(1) Are children and youth from single-parent families, those from persistently poor families, and teenagers who give birth at risk of depressed educational attainment?

The available research strongly suggests that each of these groups does indeed complete fewer years of school than do children and youth who do not share these characteristics. The total effect associated with membership in any of these groups may be a loss of a year or more of school. The research, though, suffers from a number of critical limitations. With regard to specific groups, it inadequately treats the dynamics of membership in single-parent families; and, it rarely focuses on persistence in poverty. Critical background characteristics are not always taken into account, raising questions about the meaning of the associations between depressed educational attainment and membership in these groups.

(2) How might these characteristics lead to depressed educational attainment?

Given the limitations of the available research, a conclusive response to this question is not possible. Nevertheless, the preceding analysis suggests that the characteristics used to distinguish among these three groups may affect attainment in an immediate and direct manner, as well as, indirectly through their impact on other factors. For example, the attainment of children living in single-parent families may be directly affected by the absence of one parent. At the same time, single-parent families have significantly lower income than do two-parent families; and, this low income may itself act to depress children's educational attainment.

In addition, the analysis of the educational attainment of individuals who, while in their teens, had children, poses questions about the precise roles of background characteristics and prior school experiences and performance. Although, as the analysis suggests, childbirth appears to have a depressing effect on educational attainment directly, both the incidence of childbirth among teens and depressed educational attainment may be strongly influenced by the teenagers' family background and their in-school performance and experiences.

The analysis above also focused on some of the ways in which the interaction between schools and children and youth in these special groups may contribute to depressed educational attainment. Certain school practices (such as tracking) may adversely affect the educational progress of children and youth in these groups. Poor and single parents may have difficulty being involved in school activities. School officials and teachers may have different academic and behavioral expectations for members of these groups. For example, the school programs available for pregnant teens and those who have borne children may negatively affect school persistence by offering limited academic content,

separating these teenage females from their classmates, etc. In short, the expectations that school faculty and officials may have about the educational attainment of these children and youth may limit their progress.

(3) What implications does the current research have for examining Federal responses to the educational needs of these children and youth?

The current research has a number of important implications for the development of Federal policies focused on the education of these groups. The discussion below summarizes some of these implications.

A key finding relevant for policy development is that there is no single cause of depressed educational attainment for any of these groups of children and youth. Family income is a significant intervening variable for single-parent families and it, by definition, is directly associated with persistence in poverty. Still, income alone does not appear to account for the total loss in educational attainment for any one of these groups of children and youth. One is left then with several variables that may play important roles. What is the implication of this finding for public policy?

One response might be the development of policies addressing more than one of the possible causes. For example, programs might be considered that combine such activities as compensatory or remedial education, literacy and parenting training for adults, or inservice training for teachers, with income support, work programs, or training assistance focused on the adults responsible for children. Such an approach would touch on several domains of the issue, addressing the needs of children as well as parents, and attending to problems that occur in the home and in the school.

Alternatively, in light of the administrative, political, and financial difficulties potentially associated with a comprehensive response, one might consider policies that explicitly have more limited and, perhaps, more

attainable goals. For example, it would appear that programs to address the depressed income that marks one-parent families might have some positive effect on their children's educational attainment, but would not remedy their attainment problems. Such a policy, from an educational perspective, might attempt to reduce the income-associated factors that adversely affect attainment, but is most likely not a complete response to the educational needs of these children.

In addition, public policy might focus on better and fuller examinations of the processes by which various factors affect educational attainment. Thus, coordinated and comprehensive programs supporting better longitudinal surveys of the experiences of children and youth might be one result.

Another important finding for public policy consideration is that none of these groups is static; rather, membership changes, as do other facets, such as the reasons for membership and the duration of that membership. Federal policies recognizing the dynamics of these groups might establish priorities among the members of these groups for focusing assistance (e.g., children living with a single parent for a protracted period of time). Appropriate policies might be flexible in their definition of who is to be assisted, given that children and youth move in and out of these groups. For example, it is possible that the educational difficulties stemming from living in one-parent families are not resolved when a child begins living with two parents. As a result, it might be appropriate to continue efforts addressing the needs of children from one-parent families even when they are not living in such families.

The complexities of membership in these groups, and of how such membership affects educational attainment, might lead to policy initiatives encouraging local initiatives and assessing the results of different approaches. Policymakers might conclude that it is highly problematic that the single best program to respond to the educational needs of any one of these groups of children

and youth could be fashioned at the Federal level, or, indeed, that any such single best approach exists. Thus, encouraging many different responses by schools, communities, service organizations, etc. might be seen as the most appropriate Federal policy. Such encouragement might appropriately be accompanied by monitoring and evaluation of these individual efforts, with the intention of disseminating information on the most successful of them.

Another finding with policy implications is that the educational attainment of these groups of children and youth appears to be affected by the ways in which schools treat and respond to them. At a minimum, Federal policy might benefit by recognizing this fact. Whether Federal policy should directly address that interaction might be considered, particularly given that the success of any policy initiative could be affected by the consequences of that interaction. To the extent that what is at issue here are the inner workings of schools, traditional policy development would suggest that the Federal Government will have at most only a limited role to play. Nevertheless, new ways of influencing the interaction between schools and these groups might be considered.

Significantly, a majority of students in our elementary and secondary schools will exhibit one or more of the attributes of these groups during childhood. Thus, the number of students with these attributes that schools must serve is substantial. Policies developed in light of this finding might address the financial and educational capabilities of schools to meet the needs of all of their "at risk" students. Attention to schools with particularly high concentrations of these students might also be an aspect of newly developed policy. This latter focus could be justified in light of evidence that high concentrations of such at risk students might particularly overburden schools' resources.

Another important implication from the analysis above is that current research on these groups of "at risk" children and youth generally suffers from sufficiently important limitations to prompt caution in fashioning public policy based on some of its findings. Thus Federal policy might include attention to improving the research foundation upon which programs for these groups of students might be developed.

APPENDIX A: TECHNICAL NOTE

The effects on educational attainment of parental absence, persistence in poverty, or teenage childbearing are realized through complex interactions involving other variables. One way of characterizing the impact of a variable on another variable is to distinguish among a variable's direct effect, its indirect effect, and its total effect. As is shown below, these distinctions are important for the development of public policy.

An independent variable (e.g., family structure) may affect another variable (e.g., educational attainment) in a very immediate manner; such effects are called direct. An independent variable (e.g., family structure) can also directly affect a variable (e.g., income) which, in turn, directly affects another variable (e.g., educational attainment). In this case, the measurement of the effect of the first independent variable (family structure) on the third variable (educational attainment) through its effect on the second variable (income) is called the indirect effect of the first variable on the third.

The sum of the direct and indirect effects comprise the total effect of an independent variable on another variable. 115/

The size of the direct, indirect, and total effects are estimated using statistical models to analyze the joint effects of a set of independent variables on a dependent variable.

Distinguishing direct from indirect effects provides an important understanding of the ways in which one variable (or set of variables) relates to another. For public policy purposes, this understanding could provide various potential avenues for addressing the problem at hand.

If, for example, the direct effects of a single-parent family structure on educational attainment are shown to be significantly smaller than the indirect effects working through family income, policymakers might consider the efficacy of addressing the low income of single-parent families in their efforts to raise the educational attainment of children from single-parent families.

But, public policy focused directly on the formation of single-parent families would not be precluded by a finding such as that hypothesized above. One should not minimize the role of an independent variable simply because its direct effect is smaller than its indirect effect. It is the total effect of the independent variable, not its direct effect, that tells us how strongly

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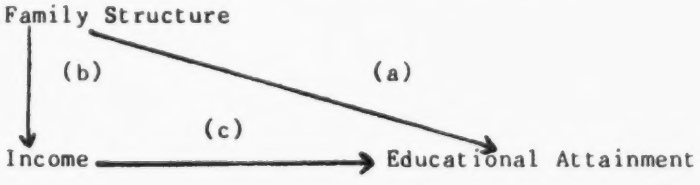
115/ These effects are shown in the following chart:



(a) = Direct effect of family structure on educational attainment.
(b) x (c) = Indirect effect of family structure on educational attainment through income.
(a) + [(b) x (c)] = Total effect of family structure on education attainment.

associated the independent variable is with another variable. The direct/ indirect distinction helps to explain the nature of that association.